



CIIS Employer HR Resources

Toolkit 2: Onboarding & Workplace Integration Toolkit

A practical employer guide for integrating and supporting diverse employees after hiring



Focus

Helping employers successfully integrate and support diverse employees after hiring. This toolkit builds on inclusive recruitment by focusing on what happens after the offer is accepted: onboarding, communication, mentorship, professional integration, accessibility, and workplace support.

How to Use This Toolkit

Employers can read this toolkit from beginning to end or use individual chapters based on immediate workplace needs. Each chapter includes a short voiceover script, practical sections, one consolidated downloadable tool, and reflection questions for managers or HR teams.

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Section 1: Why Onboarding Matters

Overview

Onboarding is one of the first opportunities an employer has to show a new employee what kind of workplace they have joined. A clear and supportive onboarding process helps employees understand their role, meet the right people, and begin their work with more confidence.

When onboarding is treated as a short administrative exercise, employees may receive forms and policy documents but very little practical guidance. They may know where to submit timesheets but still be unsure about team expectations, communication norms, how decisions are made, or where to go for help.

For employees who are new to Canada, new to a sector, or entering a workplace with unfamiliar expectations, these early weeks can feel especially uncertain. Good onboarding reduces that uncertainty by making expectations visible and support easy to access.

Employers benefit as well. Strong onboarding can reduce early turnover, improve productivity, and help managers identify support needs before small issues become larger concerns. It also creates a more consistent experience across departments, so a new employee's success does not depend entirely on which manager they happen to report to.

Employer Practice

Administrative orientation is only one part of onboarding. A useful process also explains workplace culture, communication practices, performance expectations, available supports, and team relationships. Employees should leave the first stage of onboarding knowing what they are responsible for, who they work with, how progress will be discussed, and how to ask for clarification.

Employers should also consider the emotional side of starting a new job. New employees are often trying to prove themselves while learning systems, names, expectations, and workplace routines. A welcoming and organized process helps employees settle in without feeling like they must figure everything out alone.

Employer Example

02

A mid-sized employer notices that new hires receive different information depending on their department. One employee receives a structured first-week plan, while another is given system access and expected to learn by observation. After reviewing early turnover and employee feedback, the employer introduces a consistent onboarding checklist and manager check-ins for all new hires. The result is a more predictable and supportive start for employees.

Practical Next Step

Review the current onboarding process and identify one improvement that can be standardized across all departments within the next 30 days.



Reflection Questions

What first impression does our onboarding process create?

Do all departments provide a consistent onboarding experience?

Where do new employees most often feel uncertain?

What would make onboarding more useful for managers and employees?

Section 2: Common Integration Challenges

03

Overview

Integration challenges often arise because employees are adjusting to more than their job duties. They may be learning workplace norms, communication expectations, digital systems, team relationships, and organizational decision-making processes at the same time.

Employees who are internationally trained or new to a Canadian workplace may also be navigating different assumptions about hierarchy, feedback, initiative, self-advocacy, meetings, and workplace relationships. These differences do not signal a lack of ability. They reflect different work environments and professional experiences.

Common challenges include uncertainty about when to ask questions, how much initiative is expected, how feedback is given, and how decisions are made. Some employees may hesitate to speak up because they do not want to appear unprepared. Others may avoid asking for clarification because they are trying to make a strong first impression.

Managers can reduce these challenges by naming expectations directly. Simple explanations such as “we expect questions during your first few months” or “we prefer early updates if something is unclear” can make a significant difference.



Integration works best when employers treat adjustment as a normal part of onboarding. Employees should be encouraged to ask questions, observe team practices, and gradually build confidence. Managers should not assume silence means full understanding. Regular check-ins are often the easiest way to identify confusion early.

A practical approach is to give new employees a short “how we work here” overview. This can include meeting expectations, communication channels, response times, decision-making norms, and who to contact for common questions.

Employer Example

A new employee understands the technical work but is unsure whether to speak up in meetings or wait for direction from the manager. The manager assumes the employee is quiet because they lack confidence. During a check-in, the employee explains that in their previous workplace, decisions were usually communicated by supervisors. A short conversation about team norms helps the employee participate more comfortably.

Practical Next Step

Review the current onboarding process and identify one improvement that can be standardized across all departments within the next 30 days.

Reflection Questions

Which workplace expectations may be unclear to new employees?

Do managers recognize adjustment challenges early?

Are employees encouraged to ask questions without embarrassment?

How can we reduce uncertainty during early employment?

Section 3: Creating Structured Onboarding Plans

05

Overview

Structured onboarding creates consistency. It gives managers a simple roadmap and gives employees a clear picture of what will happen during their first day, first week, and first few months.

A strong onboarding plan should cover role-specific training, introductions, systems access, policy review, performance expectations, and regular check-ins. It should also pace information so employees are not overwhelmed during the first few days.

Without structure, onboarding often depends on the individual manager. Some employees may receive detailed support while others are left to learn informally. This can create uneven experiences across the organization and increase the risk that employees miss important information.

A structured plan does not need to be complicated. A simple 30-60-90 day plan can outline what the employee should learn, what support they will receive, and how progress will be reviewed.

Employer Practice

The first 30 days should focus on orientation, introductions, key systems, role clarity, and early learning. The next 30 days can focus on deeper role understanding, team collaboration, and confidence with routine tasks. By 90 days, the employee and manager should have a clearer view of strengths, support needs, and longer-term development goals.

Managers should also have onboarding responsibilities clearly assigned. This includes scheduling meetings, confirming training, introducing team members, and checking whether the employee has the tools and information needed to work effectively.

Employer Example

06

A manager wants to support a new employee but has no onboarding plan, so key training happens informally and some steps are missed. The organization introduces a 30-60-90 day onboarding plan with specific milestones, introductions, and check-ins. The manager still has flexibility, but the employee receives a clearer and more consistent experience.

Practical Next Step

Review the current onboarding process and identify one improvement that can be standardized across all departments within the next 30 days.

30 Days	60 Days	90 Days
• Orientation • Introductions • Key Systems • Role Clarity • Early Learning	• Deeper Role Understanding • Team Collaboration • Confidence With Routine Tasks	• Clearer View of Strengths • Support Needs • Longer-Term Development Goals

Reflection Questions

Do all new hires receive a clear first-week plan?
Are 30, 60, and 90 day expectations documented?
Do managers know their onboarding responsibilities?
How can onboarding information be paced more effectively?

Section 4: Clarifying Workplace Expectations

07

Overview

Clear expectations help employees understand how to succeed. This includes expectations about job duties, work quality, communication, attendance, deadlines, decision-making, workplace behaviour, and performance discussions.

Many expectations are unwritten in organizations. Long-standing employees may know how meetings work, when to escalate an issue, or how managers prefer updates, but new employees may not. If these expectations are not explained, employees may make mistakes that could have been avoided with clearer guidance.

Clarifying expectations is especially important for employees coming from different workplace cultures or professional systems. In some workplaces, employees are expected to wait for direction. In others, they are expected to raise issues early and suggest solutions. Employers should explain their expectations instead of assuming employees will infer them.

Role clarity should also include what success looks like. Employees need to understand priorities, timelines, decision rights, and how their work connects to team goals.



Managers can support clarity through short, regular conversations. Rather than waiting for a formal performance review, managers should check whether the employee understands priorities and knows how to proceed. These conversations help prevent confusion and build trust.

Clear expectations should be documented where possible. A written role summary, onboarding plan, or early success checklist helps employees revisit information after initial conversations.

Employer Example

A new employee completes assigned tasks well but does not provide updates unless asked. The manager initially sees this as lack of initiative. During a check-in, the manager explains that the team expects early updates when deadlines may shift or questions arise. Once the expectation is made clear, communication improves quickly.

Practical Next Step

Review the current onboarding process and identify one improvement that can be standardized across all departments within the next 30 days.

Reflection Questions

Which expectations are currently unwritten?

Do employees understand communication and reporting practices?

Are managers explaining what success looks like?

Where would written guidance reduce confusion?

Section 5: Supporting Early Success

09

Overview

The first few months of employment often influence long-term engagement and retention. Employees who feel supported early are more likely to build confidence, ask questions, and develop strong working relationships.

Early success does not mean the employee is expected to master everything immediately. It means the organization provides the right support, feedback, and structure so the employee can learn effectively and contribute with growing confidence.

Regular check-ins are essential. These conversations give managers a chance to discuss workload, clarify expectations, answer questions, and identify support needs. They also give employees permission to raise concerns before they become barriers.

Employers should also pay attention to relationship-building. Employees integrate faster when they know who they work with, who can answer questions, and how their role connects to others. Team introductions, peer support, and informal touchpoints can make the workplace feel less overwhelming.



Employer Practice

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A practical early success approach includes scheduled check-ins at the end of week one, day 30, day 60, and day 90. These meetings should focus on learning progress, confidence, workload, team integration, and any barriers affecting success.

Managers should provide feedback that is clear, respectful, and timely. Employees need to know what they are doing well, where adjustments are needed, and what support is available. This creates a more positive and productive start.

Employer Example

An employee performs well in the first month but seems hesitant to ask questions. Rather than waiting for a formal review, the manager schedules a 30-day conversation focused on confidence, workload, and support needs. The employee shares that one internal system is still confusing. A short refresher prevents future delays and builds trust.

Practical Next Step

Review the current onboarding process and identify one improvement that can be standardized across all departments within the next 30 days.

Reflection Questions

Are check-ins scheduled beyond the first week?

Do employees have opportunities to raise concerns early?

Are team relationships being built intentionally?

What early support would improve confidence and retention?

Section 1: Understanding Communication Differences

Overview

Communication differences are common in diverse workplaces. Employees may vary in how directly they speak, how they participate in meetings, how they give updates, how they respond to feedback, or how comfortable they feel challenging an idea.

These differences may be shaped by culture, language background, education, previous workplace norms, personality, or professional experience. Employers should be careful not to judge capability based only on communication style.

For example, an employee who speaks less in meetings may be listening carefully rather than disengaged. Another employee may use formal language because that is what professionalism meant in a previous workplace. A third may avoid self-promotion but still produce excellent work.

Managers can support communication by being clear, checking for understanding, and creating multiple ways for employees to participate. Meetings should not be the only place where contributions are recognized. Written follow-ups, one-on-one conversations, and project updates can also help employees contribute fully.

Employer Practice

The goal is not to make everyone communicate the same way. The goal is to create shared expectations so different communication styles can work together effectively. Managers should explain preferred channels, response timelines, meeting norms, and escalation practices early in employment.

Teams also benefit from communication awareness. Existing staff should understand that different styles can be equally professional. This helps reduce misunderstandings and strengthens collaboration.

Employer Example

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In a team meeting, one employee rarely interrupts or volunteers ideas. A manager assumes the employee is disengaged. In a one-on-one conversation, the employee shares that they prefer to reflect before speaking and are more comfortable contributing after reviewing materials. The team begins sending agendas in advance, which improves participation.

Practical Next Step

Ask managers to document their team communication norms and share them with new employees during onboarding.



Reflection Questions

How might communication styles be interpreted differently on our team?

Do managers check for understanding without making assumptions?

Are there multiple ways for employees to contribute?

What communication norms should be made clearer?

Section 2: Workplace Norms and Expectations

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Overview

Every workplace has formal rules and informal norms. Formal rules may appear in policies, job descriptions, and employment agreements. Informal norms are the everyday practices employees learn by observing others.

Informal norms may include how meetings are run, how quickly emails are answered, when to copy a manager, how decisions are escalated, how feedback is shared, and how employees are expected to show initiative.

Employees who are new to the organization may not know these expectations unless they are explained. This can be especially true for employees who are new to Canadian workplaces or transitioning from another sector.

Employers should not assume that practices are obvious simply because they are familiar internally. Explaining workplace norms early reduces confusion and helps employees adjust more confidently.

Employer Practice

Workplace norms should be introduced during onboarding and reinforced through manager check-ins. Managers can explain what good communication looks like, how team decisions are made, and how employees should raise questions or concerns.

When expectations are made visible, employees are less likely to rely on guesswork. This improves confidence, performance, and workplace integration.

Employer Example

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A new employee receives positive feedback on technical work but misses an informal expectation about copying project leads on certain emails. The issue is resolved when the manager explains how information flows within the team and documents the expectation for future new hires.

Practical Next Step

Ask managers to document their team communication norms and share them with new employees during onboarding.



Reflection Questions

Which workplace norms are learned informally?

Do employees understand meeting and decision-making expectations?

Are managers explaining internal practices clearly?

What norms should be included in onboarding?

Section 3: Building Psychological Safety

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Overview

Psychological safety means employees feel able to ask questions, share ideas, admit mistakes, and raise concerns without fear of embarrassment or unfair treatment. It is an important part of workplace integration because employees need confidence to participate fully.

When employees do not feel safe, they may stay quiet even when they are confused, have a concern, or can contribute a useful idea. This can affect learning, collaboration, performance, and trust.

Psychological safety is shaped by daily behaviour. How managers respond to mistakes, questions, disagreement, and feedback sends a strong message about whether employees can speak openly.

For employees who are new to a workplace or culture, psychological safety can determine whether they ask for help early or struggle silently. Managers should normalize questions and treat early learning as part of the employment transition.



Building psychological safety does not mean avoiding accountability. It means creating an environment where employees can discuss work honestly and respectfully. Clear expectations, respectful feedback, and consistent behaviour from leaders all support this goal.

Teams with stronger psychological safety are often better at identifying problems early, learning from mistakes, and using diverse perspectives effectively.

Employer Example

An employee notices a process issue but stays silent because they are new and do not want to appear critical. A manager who regularly invites feedback during check-ins creates space for the employee to raise the concern. The team fixes the issue and reinforces that respectful input is welcomed.

Practical Next Step

Ask managers to document their team communication norms and share them with new employees during onboarding.

Reflection Questions

Do employees feel safe asking questions or raising concerns?

How do managers respond to mistakes?

Are quieter employees invited into discussion respectfully?

What behaviours would strengthen trust?

Section 4: Encouraging Questions and Feedback

17

Overview

Questions and feedback help employees learn how the workplace operates and how they can improve. Employers should make it clear that questions are expected during onboarding and early employment.

Employees may hesitate to ask questions because they do not want to appear unprepared or incapable. Some may come from workplace cultures where questioning a manager was discouraged. Others may be unsure whether they are expected to figure things out independently.

Managers can reduce this hesitation by inviting questions directly and regularly. Simple statements such as “I expect questions during your first few months” or “please check with me early if something is unclear” can create permission for open communication.

Feedback should also be practical and timely. Employees need to understand what is going well, what needs adjustment, and what support is available. Feedback should focus on behaviour, work expectations, and development rather than personality.



Employer Practice

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Two-way communication is equally important. Employees should have opportunities to share concerns, suggest improvements, and describe what support would help them perform well.

Regular check-ins create a predictable space for these conversations and reduce the chance that small issues remain unspoken.

Employer Example

A new employee waits several days before asking for clarification on an assignment. The manager realizes the employee did not know questions were expected during early onboarding. The manager begins ending check-ins with, “What is still unclear?” which helps questions surface earlier.

Practical Next Step

Ask managers to document their team communication norms and share them with new employees during onboarding.

Reflection Questions

Do managers invite questions regularly?

Is feedback timely, specific, and respectful?

Can employees offer feedback upward?

What check-in questions would improve communication?

Section 5: Supporting Cross-Cultural Collaboration

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Overview

Cross-cultural collaboration brings together employees with different experiences, communication styles, problem-solving approaches, and workplace expectations. When managed well, this diversity strengthens creativity, adaptability, and team performance.

Challenges can arise when team members interpret difference through assumption. A colleague may view direct communication as rude, or indirect communication as unclear. A manager may interpret quietness as disengagement, while the employee may be showing respect or careful listening.

Employers can support collaboration by creating clear team norms. Teams should understand how decisions are made, how disagreement is handled, how meetings should operate, and how feedback is shared.

Good collaboration also requires relationship-building. Employees are more likely to work through differences effectively when they have trust and familiarity with one another.

Employer Practice

When misunderstandings occur, managers should encourage respectful clarification rather than blame. The focus should be on understanding expectations, repairing communication, and improving future collaboration.

Cross-cultural collaboration works best when teams are curious, respectful, and willing to adapt. Employers can model this by treating different perspectives as workplace strengths rather than problems to be corrected.

Employer Example

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Two team members misunderstand each other's communication styles during a project. One prefers direct updates, while the other uses a more cautious and detailed approach. Their manager brings them together to clarify expectations for project communication. The team agrees on update formats and reduces tension.

Practical Next Step

Ask managers to document their team communication norms and share them with new employees during onboarding.



Reflection Questions

Do teams discuss how they prefer to work together?

How are misunderstandings addressed?

Are different perspectives welcomed in meetings?

What team norms would improve collaboration?

Section 1: The Value of Mentorship

Overview

Mentorship gives employees access to guidance that may not appear in formal policies or training. A mentor can help a new employee understand workplace practices, ask questions more comfortably, and build confidence in navigating the organization.

Mentorship is especially useful for employees who are adjusting to a new professional culture or organizational environment. It can help clarify unwritten expectations, reduce isolation, and create a stronger sense of connection.

Organizations also benefit. Mentorship supports knowledge-sharing, engagement, retention, and leadership development. It encourages employees to learn from one another and strengthens relationships across teams.

Effective mentorship does not need to be complex. It can begin with a peer buddy, a scheduled monthly conversation, or a structured relationship with a more experienced colleague. The most important elements are trust, consistency, and practical support.



Employers should position mentorship as a workplace support, not a remedial measure. The goal is to help employees grow, understand the organization, and access guidance that supports long-term success.

When mentorship is offered consistently, employees are less likely to depend on informal networks that may not be equally accessible to everyone.

Employer Example

A new employee is performing well but feels unsure about workplace customs, informal processes, and how to build internal relationships. A peer mentor helps explain how meetings are run, who to contact for different questions, and how the team typically collaborates. The employee becomes more confident and connected.

Practical Next Step

Identify roles or teams where mentorship would improve integration and select mentors based on availability, patience, and communication skill.

Reflection Questions

Do employees have someone they can approach for informal guidance?

Could mentorship reduce isolation or uncertainty?

Are mentorship opportunities available equitably?

How can mentorship support retention?

Section 2: Formal vs Informal Support Systems

23

Overview

Workplace support may be formal or informal. Formal supports include mentorship programs, onboarding buddies, scheduled check-ins, peer support systems, and manager-led development conversations.

Informal supports include helpful colleagues, team relationships, and casual guidance that happens naturally during the workday. These supports can be valuable, but they are not always equally available to every employee.

Organizations that rely only on informal support may unintentionally leave some employees without guidance. Employees who are new, quieter, remote, or unfamiliar with workplace norms may not know who to approach or how to build support networks.

A balanced approach works best. Employers should create enough structure to ensure support is available while still encouraging natural workplace relationships.

Employer Practice

Formal systems can provide consistency, while informal relationships can make support feel more human and accessible. Together, they help employees feel guided and included.

Managers should check whether employees actually know where to go for help. A support system only works if employees can access it comfortably.

An organization assumes new employees will naturally find helpful colleagues. Some do, but others remain disconnected. The employer introduces an onboarding buddy system while still encouraging informal peer relationships. Support becomes more consistent without making the workplace feel rigid.

Practical Next Step

Identify roles or teams where mentorship would improve integration and select mentors based on availability, patience, and communication skill.

**Mentorship
Meeting
(Formal)**



**Peer Support
(Informal)**



Reflection Questions

- Are support systems consistent across teams?*
- Who might be left out if support remains informal?*
- What formal support would be helpful but not burdensome?*
- How can informal relationships be encouraged?*

Section 3: Pairing Mentors Effectively

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Overview

Mentorship works best when pairings are thoughtful. A strong mentor is not simply someone with seniority. Effective mentors are approachable, patient, respectful, and willing to provide practical guidance.

Employers should consider the employee's role, goals, communication style, learning needs, and department context when assigning a mentor. The mentor's availability and workload should also be considered, since mentorship requires time and attention.

Clear expectations matter. Mentors should understand their role, meeting frequency, confidentiality expectations, and the type of support they are expected to provide. Employees should also understand what mentorship is for and how to use the relationship productively.

Poorly matched mentorship can feel performative or unhelpful. Thoughtful matching creates stronger trust and better outcomes.



Mentors should not replace managers. Managers remain responsible for performance expectations, role clarity, and formal feedback. Mentors provide additional guidance, context, and support.

Organizations should review mentorship pairings periodically to ensure they remain useful. If a pairing is not working, adjustments should be made without stigma.

Employer Example

A senior employee is assigned as a mentor because of experience, but their workload leaves little time for support. The organization adjusts its approach and selects mentors based on availability, communication skills, and willingness to guide others. Mentorship becomes more useful for employees.

Practical Next Step

Identify roles or teams where mentorship would improve integration and select mentors based on availability, patience, and communication skill.

Reflection Questions

Are mentors selected for support skills, not seniority alone?

Do mentors have time and clarity?

Are pairings reviewed for usefulness?

What would make mentor matching stronger?

Section 4: Supporting Career Navigation

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Overview

Employees often need guidance on how careers progress within an organization. This includes understanding promotion pathways, professional development opportunities, internal hiring practices, and expectations for advancement.

Employees who are new to Canada or unfamiliar with local workplace systems may not know how to communicate career interests, build internal networks, or prepare for advancement opportunities. Without guidance, capable employees may remain underused or disengaged.

Managers and mentors can support career navigation through regular development conversations. These conversations should explore the employee's goals, strengths, interests, learning needs, and possible growth pathways.

Career support improves retention because employees are more likely to stay when they can see a future within the organization.

Employer Practice

Employers should also make development opportunities visible. Training, stretch assignments, mentoring, shadowing, and internal postings should be communicated clearly and made accessible across teams.

Career navigation should be fair and transparent. Employees should not need insider knowledge or informal relationships to understand how to grow.

An internationally trained employee wants to grow but is unsure how promotions work in the organization. A manager begins quarterly career conversations and explains development expectations, internal postings, and training options. The employee can now plan growth more realistically.

Practical Next Step

Identify roles or teams where mentorship would improve integration and select mentors based on availability, patience, and communication skill.



Reflection Questions

Do employees understand advancement pathways?

Are career conversations happening regularly?

Are development opportunities visible and accessible?

How can managers better recognize prior experience?

Overview

Integration continues after onboarding. Employees may still be learning communication norms, team dynamics, workplace expectations, and confidence in their role for several months.

Monitoring integration helps employers identify support needs early. A manager may discover that an employee needs more clarity, additional training, help building relationships, or support understanding workplace processes.

Integration check-ins should look beyond task completion. They should also consider confidence, communication comfort, team connection, understanding of expectations, and access to support.

Employees may not raise challenges on their own, especially if they are still trying to make a strong impression. Regular check-ins create a safe and predictable opportunity for discussion.



Integration tracking should be supportive rather than punitive. The goal is to help employees succeed and to improve organizational practices over time.

Feedback from these check-ins can also help employers improve onboarding, mentorship, training, and manager support for future employees.

Employer Example

A manager assumes onboarding is complete after the first month because the employee is meeting deadlines. A 60-day check-in reveals that the employee still feels disconnected from the team. The manager arranges project collaboration and a mentor touchpoint, which improves integration.

Practical Next Step

Identify roles or teams where mentorship would improve integration and select mentors based on availability, patience, and communication skill.

Reflection Questions

Are integration check-ins scheduled after onboarding?

Do reviews include confidence and team connection?

Are support needs identified early?

How is feedback used to improve the process?

Section 1: Understanding Transition Challenges**Overview**

Internationally trained professionals may enter a workplace with strong technical experience but limited familiarity with local workplace systems, industry terminology, regulatory pathways, or communication norms.

Transition challenges can include understanding local standards, adapting to new systems, learning workplace expectations, navigating professional networks, and rebuilding confidence after underemployment or career disruption.

Employers should avoid assuming that adjustment challenges indicate lack of ability. In many cases, employees are adapting strong skills to a new context.

Understanding these challenges helps managers provide practical support instead of leaving employees to navigate the transition alone.

Employer Practice

A supportive employer asks what information, tools, or context would help the employee apply their skills successfully. This may include introductions to industry practices, clarification of role expectations, or opportunities to observe how work is completed locally.

Transition support should be connected to the role and should respect the employee's existing expertise.

Employer Example

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An internationally trained professional has strong technical experience but is unfamiliar with local reporting templates and workplace terminology. The manager initially sees delays as performance concerns. After discussing the issue, the employer provides examples and a short orientation to internal standards, allowing the employee to apply their expertise more effectively.

Practical Next Step

Review whether internationally trained employees are using their full skills and whether any workplace or credential support would improve growth and retention.



Reflection Questions

What local workplace context may internationally trained employees need?

Are managers distinguishing transition needs from performance concerns?

How can existing expertise be recognized earlier?

What support would help employees apply their skills?

Section 2: Bridging Workplace Gaps

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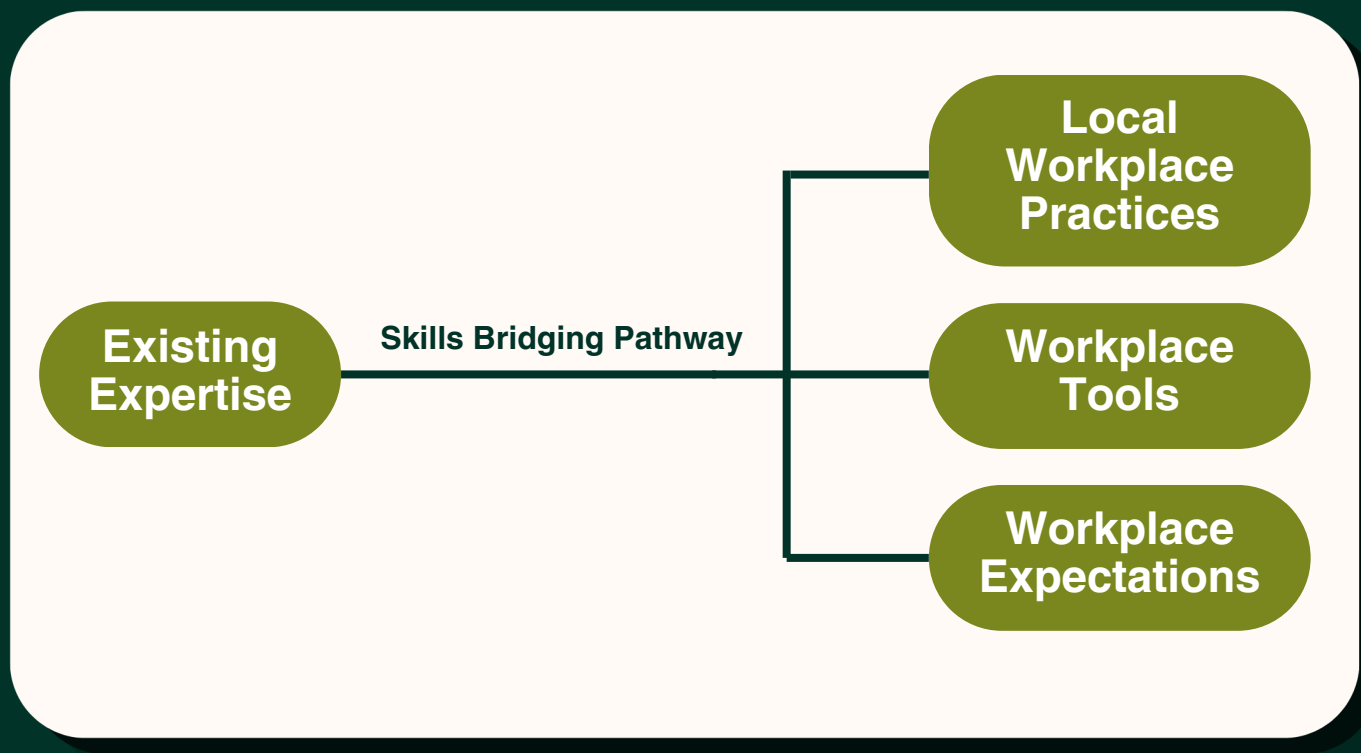
Overview

Workplace gaps often relate to context rather than competence. An employee may need support understanding internal systems, local terminology, reporting expectations, documentation practices, or customer/client communication norms.

Employers can bridge these gaps through practical training, job shadowing, peer support, and clear process documentation. Support should be specific and connected to actual work responsibilities.

For example, an internationally trained professional may understand project management well but need to learn the organization's tools, approval process, reporting templates, or stakeholder expectations.

Bridging support works best when managers identify gaps early and respond with targeted guidance.



Employers should also involve employees in identifying what support they need. This respects their professional experience and helps avoid assumptions.

A strong bridging plan focuses on what the employee needs to perform confidently in the local workplace context.

Employer Example

An employee has led complex projects internationally but needs support using the organization's project management tools and approval process. A short skills bridging plan identifies the local systems to learn, a peer to shadow, and a timeline for independent use.

Practical Next Step

Review whether internationally trained employees are using their full skills and whether any workplace or credential support would improve growth and retention.

Reflection Questions

Which gaps relate to systems, terminology, or process rather than ability?

Are bridging supports specific and time-bound?

Do employees help identify their own support needs?

What workplace examples or shadowing would help?

Overview

Some internationally trained professionals may need support navigating credential recognition, licensing, certification, or professional registration processes. These processes can be complex, time-consuming, and difficult to understand without guidance.

Employers do not need to manage the process for the employee, but they can provide practical support. This may include flexibility for exams or appointments, information about relevant professional bodies, documentation of work experience, or encouragement to pursue required steps.

Credential pathways are especially important in regulated professions, but they may also affect advancement in non-regulated roles where local certifications are valued.

Employers who support credential navigation can improve retention by helping employees see a future within the organization.

Credential Pathway



Support should be discussed respectfully. Some employees may already be managing credential processes privately, while others may not know where to begin. Managers can ask open questions about career goals and whether credentials or certifications are part of the employee's development plan.

Where possible, employers should connect credential support to professional development planning.

Employer Example

An employee is working toward a Canadian certification related to their profession. The employer cannot complete the process for them, but provides schedule flexibility for exams and confirms how current work experience can support their application. This shows practical support for long-term growth.

Practical Next Step

Review whether internationally trained employees are using their full skills and whether any workplace or credential support would improve growth and retention.

Reflection Questions

Do employees know which credentials may support growth?

Can the employer provide practical support without taking over the process?

Are credential goals discussed respectfully?

What flexibility or documentation may be helpful?

Section 4: Providing Career Development Opportunities

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Overview

Internationally trained employees may bring strong experience but still face limited access to growth opportunities if managers do not fully understand their background or potential.

Career development should include fair access to training, stretch assignments, mentorship, leadership opportunities, and internal advancement pathways. Employees should understand what skills or experiences are needed to grow within the organization.

Managers should avoid viewing internationally trained professionals only through the lens of adjustment. They should also recognize the experience, resilience, language skills, and global perspectives these employees may bring.

Development conversations help uncover strengths that may not be visible in day-to-day tasks.

Employer Practice

Employers should provide clear feedback on performance and growth readiness. Employees benefit from knowing what they are doing well, what skills to strengthen, and what opportunities may be available.

Career development should be transparent, structured, and accessible, so advancement does not depend only on informal networks.

Employer Example

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A manager learns that an employee has previous leadership experience that was not obvious in their current role. Through development conversations, the manager assigns a small project lead opportunity and connects the employee to leadership training.

Practical Next Step

Review whether internationally trained employees are using their full skills and whether any workplace or credential support would improve growth and retention.



Reflection Questions

Are internationally trained employees considered for growth opportunities?

Do managers understand prior experience and strengths?

Are development opportunities accessible?

What stretch assignments could support growth?

Overview

Retention of internationally trained professionals depends on more than hiring. Employees are more likely to stay when their skills are recognized, their career goals are taken seriously, and they see meaningful pathways for growth.

Common retention risks include underemployment, lack of advancement, limited recognition of previous experience, weak workplace support, and unclear development opportunities.

Employers can strengthen retention by creating fair performance processes, supporting credential and career pathways, offering mentorship, and ensuring managers understand how to recognize transferable and international experience.

Retention also improves when employees feel respected as professionals rather than treated only as newcomers or learners.



Managers should regularly discuss engagement, workload, career goals, and support needs. These conversations can identify early warning signs before employees become disengaged or begin looking elsewhere.

Organizations that retain skilled talent benefit from deeper expertise, stronger workforce stability, and broader workplace perspectives.

Employer Example

An internationally trained employee begins to disengage because their role uses only a small part of their expertise. A stay conversation reveals that they want more challenging work. The employer identifies a stretch assignment and clearer growth pathway, reducing the risk of losing the employee.

Practical Next Step

Review whether internationally trained employees are using their full skills and whether any workplace or credential support would improve growth and retention.

Reflection Questions

Are employees using their full skills?

Could underemployment affect retention?

Are stay conversations happening early enough?

What growth pathway would help retain skilled talent?

Section 1: Duty to Accommodate

Overview

The duty to accommodate requires employers to take reasonable steps to remove barriers that prevent employees from participating fully in the workplace, up to the point of undue hardship. Accommodation may relate to disability, religion, family status, or other protected grounds under human rights law.

Accommodation should be handled with dignity, confidentiality, and respect. Employers should focus on the employee's needs and the essential requirements of the job rather than assumptions about what the employee can or cannot do.

A clear accommodation process helps managers respond consistently and appropriately. Employees should know how to request accommodation and should feel confident that requests will be handled professionally.

Accommodation is often a collaborative process. Employers and employees may need to discuss needs, possible solutions, timelines, and whether adjustments are working.



Examples may include modified schedules, accessible technology, adjusted duties, communication supports, or flexibility for religious observance. The appropriate accommodation depends on the individual situation and workplace requirements.

Managers should avoid asking unnecessary personal questions. The focus should remain on workplace needs, functional limitations where relevant, and practical supports.

Employer Example

An employee requests an adjustment to their schedule for a protected need. The manager avoids making assumptions and asks what workplace support would help the employee meet role requirements. HR helps document the discussion and agree on a practical arrangement to review after a set period.

Practical Next Step

Confirm that managers know how to respond to accommodation requests and where to access current accessibility guidance.

Reflection Questions

Do employees know how to request accommodation?

Are managers responding respectfully and consistently?

Is confidentiality protected?

Are accommodations reviewed when circumstances change?

Section 2: Accessibility in the Workplace

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Overview

Accessibility means designing workplace practices, communication, tools, and environments so employees can participate effectively. It includes physical, digital, procedural, and communication-related accessibility.

Accessible workplaces benefit employees with disabilities, but they also improve clarity and usability for everyone. Clear documents, accessible meetings, flexible communication options, and barrier-free processes can strengthen workplace inclusion broadly.

Employers should consider accessibility during onboarding, training, performance management, communication, and workplace events. Accessibility should be built into workplace systems instead of treated as an exception.

Small changes can make a meaningful difference. For example, sending meeting materials in advance, ensuring digital documents are readable, providing captions where needed, or checking whether training platforms are accessible can improve participation.

Employer Practice

Accessibility also includes attitude and culture. Employees should feel comfortable raising accessibility needs without fear of being judged or treated differently.

Managers and HR staff should be familiar with internal accessibility procedures and know where to go for support.

A new employee needs training materials in a more accessible format. The employer reviews its onboarding documents and realizes several resources are difficult to use with assistive technology. Updating the materials supports the employee and improves the process for future staff.

Practical Next Step

Confirm that managers know how to respond to accommodation requests and where to access current accessibility guidance.

Workplace Accessibility

Digital Access

Communication
Access

Physical
Access

Inclusive
Processes

Reflection Questions

Are onboarding and training materials accessible?
Do employees have accessible communication options?
Are barriers reviewed proactively?
What accessibility improvement can be made now?

Section 3: Understanding AODA Requirements

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Overview

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, often referred to as the AODA, sets accessibility requirements for Ontario organizations. The employment standard under Ontario accessibility rules includes requirements related to recruitment, workplace information, accommodation, performance management, career development, and return-to-work processes.

Employers should ensure that accessibility is considered throughout the employment relationship, not only during hiring. During onboarding, employees should receive information about relevant accessibility policies, accommodation processes, and available supports.

Organizations should also ensure workplace information is accessible when requested. This may include job-related materials, training information, emergency procedures, and communication supports.

Compliance requirements can vary depending on organization size and context, so employers should review current Ontario guidance and seek advice where needed.

AODA Workplace Checklist

Recruitment



Onboarding



**Accommodation
Accessible Information**



**Performance
Management**



A practical approach is to include accessibility reminders in onboarding checklists and manager training. This helps ensure accessibility is treated as part of regular workplace practice.

Employers should also keep records of accessibility training, policies, and accommodation processes where required.

Employer Example

During onboarding, an employer reviews whether accessibility information is included in manager guidance, training materials, and workplace policies. The review shows that recruitment information is accessible, but internal training resources need improvement. The employer updates the process and records the change.

Practical Next Step

Confirm that managers know how to respond to accommodation requests and where to access current accessibility guidance.

Reflection Questions

Are managers aware of accessibility obligations?

Is accessibility built into employment practices?

Are policies and training current?

What records or processes need review?

Section 4: Supporting Employees Respectfully

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Overview

Respectful support means treating employees as capable professionals while recognizing that they may need adjustments, information, or support to participate fully.

Employers should avoid making assumptions about an employee's needs, background, disability, family responsibilities, religion, or ability. Support should be based on conversation, evidence where appropriate, and the employee's workplace needs.

Respectful support also requires confidentiality. Information related to accommodation or personal circumstances should only be shared with those who need it to implement support.

Managers should focus on practical workplace solutions. A respectful question might be, "What support would help you perform this part of the role effectively?" rather than asking for unnecessary personal details.

Employer Practice

Employees should also be included in decisions that affect them. Support works best when it is collaborative, clear, and reviewed over time.

When employers respond respectfully, employees are more likely to ask for help early and remain engaged in the workplace.

A manager receives personal information related to an accommodation request and is unsure what to share with the team. HR reminds the manager that only necessary information should be shared to implement the accommodation. The employee's privacy is protected while workplace support is arranged.

Practical Next Step

Confirm that managers know how to respond to accommodation requests and where to access current accessibility guidance.



Reflection Questions

Are support conversations handled with dignity?

Are assumptions being avoided?

Is only necessary information being shared?

How can managers build trust during support discussions?

Overview

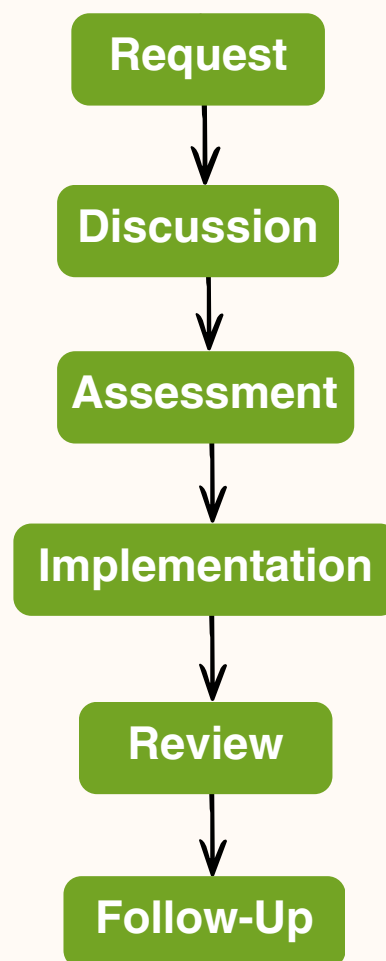
Accommodation requests should be handled promptly, respectfully, and consistently. Employers should have a clear process for receiving requests, gathering necessary information, exploring options, implementing accommodations, and reviewing whether they are effective.

Not every request will require the same level of documentation. Employers should ask only for information reasonably needed to understand the workplace limitation and possible accommodation. Confidentiality should be maintained throughout the process.

Once an accommodation is implemented, it should be monitored. Needs may change, work requirements may shift, or an accommodation may need adjustment. Follow-up is an important part of the process.

Managers should also know when to involve HR or senior leadership, especially when requests are complex, involve medical information, or require changes to duties, schedules, or workplace systems.

Accommodation Request Workflow



A clear accommodation process reduces confusion for both employees and managers. It also supports consistency, compliance, and trust.

Employers should treat accommodation as part of building a fair and accessible workplace, not as an inconvenience or exception.

Employer Example

An accommodation is approved but not reviewed for several months. The employee's role changes, and the original arrangement no longer works well. The manager schedules a follow-up, discusses what needs to change, and updates the plan with HR support.

Practical Next Step

Confirm that managers know how to respond to accommodation requests and where to access current accessibility guidance.

Reflection Questions

Is there a clear process for accommodation requests?

Are requests addressed promptly?

Are accommodations reviewed for effectiveness?

When should HR be involved?

Implementation Roadmap for Employers

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First 30 Days



Review current onboarding practices, identify inconsistencies across departments, and confirm that managers have basic onboarding guidance. Select one improvement that can be implemented immediately, such as a first-week check-in or updated onboarding checklist.

Next 60 Days



Introduce structured onboarding plans, clarify workplace communication expectations, and identify where mentorship or peer support would improve employee integration. Begin using the consolidated chapter tools with new hires.

Next 90 Days



Review early employee feedback, manager observations, and integration progress. Update onboarding and communication practices based on what employees and managers identify as helpful.

Ongoing Practice

Build onboarding, mentorship, accessibility, and career support into regular HR practice. Review outcomes regularly and adjust supports as the organization grows.

Downloadable Tools Included

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1. Onboarding and Early Success Planner

*Use this tool with **Chapter 1: Building an Inclusive Onboarding Experience***

Combines onboarding checklist, 30-60-90 day planning, early success check-ins, and manager support prompts.

2. Workplace Communication and Integration Guide

*Use this tool with **Chapter 2: Workplace Communication and Cultural Integration***

Combines communication expectations, team integration prompts, psychological safety reminders, and cross-cultural conversation guidance.

3. Mentorship and Integration Support Planner

*Use this tool with **Chapter 3: Mentorship and Workplace Support***

Combines mentorship program planning, mentor matching, career navigation prompts, and integration tracking.

4. Internationally Trained Professional Support Plan

*Use this tool with **Chapter 4: Supporting Internationally Trained Professionals***

Combines skill bridging, credential pathway support, development planning, and retention review prompts.

5. Accommodation and Accessibility Workplace Guide

*Use this tool with **Chapter 5: Accommodation, Accessibility and Workplace Rights***

Combines accommodation process guidance, accessibility review prompts, and respectful support practices.

Legal and Source Note

This toolkit is an employer guidance resource and does not replace legal advice. Employers should consult current Ontario requirements and qualified advisors when addressing complex accommodation, accessibility, or workplace rights matters.

Key legal guidance reviewed includes Government of Ontario information on accessible workplaces and Ontario Human Rights Commission guidance on the duty to accommodate and accommodation procedures in employment.